WHATSAPP USES AND GRATIFICATIONS:
A FOCUS GROUP RESEARCH

Doç. Dr. Serra İnci ÇELEBİ
İstanbul Yeni Yüzyil University
serrainci.celebi@yeniyuzyil.edu.tr
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7488-9234

Prof. Dr. Remziye TERKAN
Fifteen November University of Cyprus
remziyeterkan@onbeskku.edu.tr
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5309-3285

ABSTRACT

WhatsApp is popular among other social media. As a result of this popularity, when contact numbers are exchanging, everybody asks each other whether or not there is a WhatsApp number. Compared to Facebook, WhatsApp is seen more personal. The participants reasoned that people in your private life know your WhatsApp number. But, your facebook account can be found by anybody and you can receive messages by unknown people. Students in general don't agree that WhatsApp distanced them from face-to-face communication. In contrast, they believed that it improved communication and that WhatsApp changed the way they communicate with each other. This research has been done to reveal the reasons of the popularity of WhatsApp usage.

Keywords: WhatsApp, Uses & Gratifications, Ease of Communication.

WHATSAPP KULLANIMLAR VE DOYUMLAR:
ODAK GRUP ÇALIŞMASI

Doç. Dr. Serra İnci ÇELEBİ
İstanbul Yeni Yüzyil University
serrainci.celebi@yeniyuzyil.edu.tr
ORCID ID: 0000-0001-7488-9234

Prof. Dr. Remziye TERKAN
Fifteen November University of Cyprus
remziyeterkan@onbeskku.edu.tr
ORCID ID: 0000-0002-5309-3285

ÖZ

WhatsApp diğer sosyal medyalar arasında popüler bir yere sahip. Bu popülerliğin sonuçlarından bir tanesi de iletişim numaraları değişirken herkes birbirlerine WhatsApp numarası olup olmadığını soruyor. Facebook ile karşılaştırıldığında WhatsApp daha kişisel görülüyor. Katılımcılar, özel hayatlarındaki kişilerin WhatsApp numaralarını bildiklerini düşünüyorlar. Ancak Facebook hesabınız herkes tarafından bulunabilir ve bilinmeyen kişilerden mesaj alabilirsiniz deniyor. Öğrenciler genel olarak WhatsApp'ın kendilerini yüz yüze iletişimden uzaklaştırdığını kabul etmiyorlar. Aksine iletişimi geliştirdiğini ve WhatsApp'ın birbirleriyle iletişim kurma şeklini değiştirdiğine inanıyorlar. Bu araştırma, WhatsApp kullanımının popülerliğinin nedenlerini ortaya çıkarmak için yapılmıştır.

Anahtar kelimeler: WhatsApp, Kullanımlar & Doyumlar, İletişim kolaylığı.

INTRODUCTION

There is a decrease in interpersonal skills due to an increase in social media use (Diercksen, DiPlacido, Harvey, & Bosco, 2013). WhatsApp is considered one of those social media used via our smart phones. It is an application which is used to send messages, images, audio or video by smart-phones users (Jain, 2017). It is used in both personal and professional interactions. WhatsApp usage results in improving relationships and professional gains. (Banerjee, 2016). "Whatsapp is a messenger that aims to replicate the SMS experience, but avoid the expense of SMS" (Putra, 2017: 1).

WhatsApp was discovered by Brian Acton and Jan Koum after they left their job at Yahoo in 2009! (''The History'', 2020). There are many resons of using Whatsapp over other media and two blue ticks are one of them. A single grey tick means that the message was successfully sent by the WhatsApp servers. Two grey ticks mean that the message was successfully delivered to the recepient's device. Finally, two blue tick marks mean that the recepeient has actually read your message.

Whatsapp has some features that more acceptable than the other social networks. It has practical usage which is attractive for use. It is most popular messaging service in the world. When received a lot of images/messages/visual materials via whatsapp sometimes do not want them to be downloaded. You think that they are not interesting for downloading at that time and if you want you do not consider and delete them. In addition to them you can keep in whatsapp storage and if you see it necessary for you and for your work you can download it.

On the other hand if you want to block someone on whatsapp, it is simple. You can or may be you want to remove block you can do it again and make it active for your mobile guide.

"Whatsapp again launched an interesting feature

that can be used by many people. Almost like snapchat and Instagram Stories, you can change the status to be more attractive than ever" (Putra, 2017: 4).

If someone wants to talk at the same time, they can talk or write at the same time as a group. Pro Gamer stated that "If you see two blue check marks next to your sent message then the recipient has read your message. In a group chat or broadcast message, the check marks will turn blue whenevery participant has read your message" (2018: 4).

On the other hand if a user do not want to shown by reader (message receiver), user can hide his/her situation via settings. That is another preferable features of whatsapp.

Whatsapp provides voice message. That is very usefull feature for users. When they could not enough time for write message, they can record fastly their voice.

If user need to restore their older messages, they can backups. Pro Gamer emphasized that "Whatsapp automatically makes backups every day at 4 AM and stores them in the Whatsapp folder of your Android phone. This folder is either located in your device's internal memory or external microSD card"(2018: 6).

Whatsapp improved itself with technological development it has many features. İbrahim and Safieddine explained that "…people nowadays rely more on instant – messaging applications such as Whatsapp compared to other social – media apps because users feel these apps are safer and are private means of communication" (2020: 54).

Morris declared that "Whatsapp offers instant and synchronous communication, which is reminiscent of using SMS or MSN text messaging, where asynchronous and synchronous are implicit social options for using the interactive tool" (2018: 214).

Its usage is very easy and convenient for everyone.

It is known that most users are using whatsapp for messaging, sharing photos/videos, sent documents and calling. Banerjee said "You're one in the billion users. Are you using Whatsapp for your comfort and better quality of life? It is a powerful tool but you need to master the tricks and techniques of using Whatsapp" (2016: 2).

In addition to its worldwide usage WhatsApp has shown a decline in use because of privacy issues.

In order to explain the usage of WhatsApp, first, uses and gratifications theory was explained. Second, methodology was mentioned. Third, research results were reported. Finally, concluding discussions were summarized.

1. THEORY: USES AND GRATIFICATIONS

Uses and gratifications theory declares that people search for certain media to satisfy their social, psychological and communication needs (Armstrong & McAdams, 2009). According to uses and gratifications theory, people use social media to have gratification (Quan-Haase & Young, 2010). The theory explains why people use mass media (e.g., social media) and which gratifications are obtained (Dainton & Zelley, 2011). It is one of the most popular theories in social media research. Previous media studies looks at the effects of media by using it and considers audiences as passive media users. Uses and gratifications theory sees audience as active seekers of media outlets (Austin & Jin, 2018; Dolan, 2015; Pantic, 2017; Sikolia, Mberia, & Okumu – Bigambo, 2015). The aim of uses and gratifications perspective is to investigate what people do with media instead of what media do to people (Pantic, 2017). The theory states that people have various needs (e.g., communication) and those needs are satisfied by the selection of certain types of media (e.g., via WhatsApp chat) (Blumler & Katz, 1974). ''For instance, when an audience member has a need for escape, there are specific media available to gratify this need in a satisfactory manner'' (Quan-Haase, & Young, 2010: 351).

''Uses and gratifications is a user-centered approach and unlike to other theories of media effect user and gratification focuses on 'what do people do with media'?'' (Hussain, Taimoor-ul-Hassan, & Shabir, 2019: 2).

The theory has been used to explain the usage of traditional media such as newspapers and radio; it has been adopted to explore new media like WhatsApp (Hossain, 2019; Kim, 2016).

The Uses and gratifications theory has its origins in the communications literature and thus, its investigaton is relevant to social media. Social media is a communication platform that allows its members to communicate with individuals all around the world (Whiting & Williams, 2013). WhatsApp as one of the social media is used for information, discussion and connection. Today uses and gratifications theory mainly focuses on the Internet and social network sites (SNSs). ''Therefore the approach may help to explain the enormous popularity of particular SNSs and mobile chat applications'' (Tanta, Mihovilović, & Sablić, 2014: 90).

Terkan and Celebi (2020: 182) found in their study that ''WhatsApp's contribution to positive two way communication in the workplace increased work performance''. Celebi and Terkan (2020) also discovered positive effect between the use of social media and employee's cooperation and two-way communication. When workplace social media usage frequencey increased, it affected particiants' work performance in a positive way.

Research questions based on the theory are as following:
RQ1: What are the reasons to use WhatsApp over other social media (e.g., Skype, Facebook, Viber)?
RQ2: What are the uses and gratifications gathered by using WhatsApp?
RQ3: Can we compare communication before and after WhatsApp?
RQ4: Does use of WhatsApp in the workplace affect the working productivity?

2. METHODOLOGY

We applied focus group on the 26th of July 2018 at 10.30. The duration of the interview was fourty-five minutes and the discussion was voice recorded. The interviews were in Turkish and once it was completed and the participants were thanked, the voice records were translated into English. An ideal number of a focus group is between eight and twelve. This focus group consisted of ten participants who were university students at Faculty of Communication in a university in the Northern part of North Cyprus. Students were registered to summer school and got credit for their participation.

The interview was semi-structured and eighteen open ended questions (they are in appendix) were asked to the participants.

3. RESEARCH RESULTS

3.1. Demographic results

Half of the participants was male and the other half was female. Their ages were 23 years (N=4), 24 years (N=2), 25 years (N=2), 26 years (N=1), and 27 (N=1) years. Six of them were from the Department of Public Relations and four of them from the Department of Journalism and Broadcasting.

3.2. Findings

The results of the interview questions were summarized as follows:

3.2.1. Using WhatsApp, But Not Viber

All participants agreed that they used WhatsApp but not Viber. Although both apps are similar to each other, the reason for using WhatsApp but not Viber varied. According to participants, people commonly used WhatsApp, but Viber's usage is not widespread. Its popularity made them use WhatsApp. They believed that WhatsApp was practical and functional to use. WhatsApp reinvented itself, but Viber stayed as it is. One states

that: "When people at times exchange contact numbers, everybody asks each other if they have a telephone number and WhatsApp, they don't ask if they have Viber". They all agreed that they have witnessed reinvention of WhatsApp which updates itself automatically.

3.2.2. The Difference Between Facebook and WhatsApp

The participants agreed that WhatsApp was used by everybody in all age groups, but Facebook was aging and becoming a type of social media used by certain age groups.

One states that: "You view what your friends have done, their photos and videos on Facebook; on the other hand, WhatsApp's fundamental is on calling and messaging and thus, is not in the same category. If you are bored you may spend your time on Facebook; but, WhatsApp is used for calling, sending messages and is used more than Facebook".

Another ads that: "WhatsApp is more trustable; because, WhatsApp is more person specific, but Facebook messages are seen by everyone".

Some clarified that they were interested in messages sent via WhatsApp, because it was registered on their phone and they knew this in person and the message was more important for them. If somebody knew their WhatsApp, then this person was in their private life; however, anybody can find them on Facebook and send them a message via Facebook.

3.2.3. Why to Use WhatsApp Instead of Skype

The majority of participants used WhatsApp for many years (e.g., four participants used WhatsApp for 9 years; one participant used it for 8 years). They used WhatsApp for basically communication. They believed that it was an economical way of communication with distanced friends and family members. They were asked why they

didn't use Skype but WhatsApp. One declared that she used to communicate with her parents via Skype when she first started the university. Then, she and her parents bought new phones and uploaded WhatsApp to their phones. All agreed that its popularity was the main reason of its usage. Another summarized that "WhatsApp covers, essentially everything and we do not need any other social media."

3.2.4. Features of WhatsApp Liked the Most

In terms of the liked features of WhatsApp they had different answers. According to them, WhatsApp consumed less Internet compared to other social media. Facebook for example was full of videos and photos, and this effects its consumption of the Internet. This was also the main reason of using WhatsApp in place of other social media.

One stated being able to delete a message was the most liked feature; because, he sometimes has sent the wrong message to the wrong people. Another stated the blue tick was her favorite, her statement is: "When I send my message via SMS service, I don't understand if it is seen or not; but when I send my message via WhatsApp, I do understand it is seen". Another participant mentioned that "online" function was the most liked. He could check whether or not a person is still connected and online.

3.2.5. f2e (Face-to-Face to Electronic)

Many people make friends electronically and continue their relationships in the real world. This is called e2f (electronic to face-to-face). But, via WhatsApp this has become vice versa. The participants agreed that "People meet each other in the real world first, and then they carry their relatnship to online environment via WhatsApp."

3.2.6. Comparison of Communication Before and After WhatsApp

The participants didn't agree that using WhatsApp

was because of escaping from face-to-face communication. They declared that it was used particularly because of easing communication. For instance, if you had a subject which was difficult to be talked about face-to face, it was good to send it via WhatsApp. They also added that before WhatsApp communication was not common and widespread as today, there used to be the popularity of Facebook.

3.2.7. The Importance of Using WhatsApp on Special Days (e.g., celebrations)

The majority of participants tended to use WhatsApp for celebrating special days such as bayrams, birthdays, and New Years' Eve. Only two participants preferred sending celebration cards via Facebook. This shows us the rising trend of using WhatsApp for sending celebration cards over other type of social media.

3.2.8. The Use of WhatsApp in the Workplace

One said WhatsApp increases 100% business productivity and effectiveness. Two participants work as journalist and one of them believed WhatsApp eased his works; while the other one still used Facebook groups for sharing news and news related photos for work purposes. One participant works in logistics said she didn't get any benefit by using WhatsApp, in contrast she had difficulty doing her business at work.

CONCLUDING DISCUSSIONS

This study aproves the uses and gratifications theory. Users were independent in media selection. They stated that they consumed and shared WhatsApp to obtain gratifications for their needs (Hussain, Taimoor-ul-Hassan, & Shabir, 2019).

The uses and gratifications theory explains that people have needs and if the environment fails to satisfy those needs, people choose certain media types to satisfy their needs (Blumler & Katz, 1974). In order to satisfy communication needs

there are several applications and WhatsApp is one of them. There are some applications which have a similar function to WhatsApp, but they are not popular. For instance, Viber, compared to WhatsApp is not commonly used. The participants believed that practicality and functionality of WhatsApp make it a popular app. People also believed that WhatsApp updates and reinvents itself but Viber and other similar apps stayed as they are.

Comparing to Facebook, WhatsApp is used for chatting and messaging. But, Facebook is convenient for spending your time, when you are bored or there is nothing else to do. Additionally, a Facebook account is seen by the majority and an unknown person may send you a message. However, WhatsApp is more trustable and specific. If somebody sends you a message, this is because this person has your telephone number and is in your private life.

The participants agreed that WhatsApp used less consumption of the Internet compared to other social media. Other social media, for example Facebook, has a lot of photos and videos and consumes more Internet which is not convenient. Internet consumption is an important factor for social media preference. WhatsApp, compared to Facebook and Instagram consumes less Internet GB. This is the main difference between text-based social media and visual based social media.

There are certain features of WhatsApp which is liked. One of them is the blue tick which is the indication of whether or not a message was seen. Another popular function is online which, shows if a person is connected or not.

Before using WhatsApp, people used to carry their online friendship to the real world which is called e2f (electronic to face-to-face). They still do this via Facebook and similar use of social media. But, WhatsApp changed this relationship. WhatsApp changed this trend of meeting in a virtual world and then carrying this friendship into the real world (e2f). First, people make friends in

real life and then by exchanging WhatsApp numbers they continue their friendship online. That is, first they know each other in the real world and then carry this relationship into the virtual world. F2e (face-to-face to electronic) era has started via WhatsApp.

Some participants who work mentioned that WhatsApp eased their work and increased connection confirming the study by Terkan and Celebi (2020). All in all, the benefits gathered by using WhatsApp in the workplace, depends on the type of work performed. While the use of WhatsApp was functional for journalism, it was considered a waste of time for some office work.

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APPENDIX: FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

1. Does everybody use WhatsApp?
2. Do you use Viber?
3. Why do you use WhatsApp, but not Viber?
4. How has WhatsApp developed itself? Have you realized the development of WhatsApp while you have been using it?
5. What's the difference between Facebook and WhatsApp?
6. How long have you been using WhatsApp?
7. What are the reasons you use WhatsApp?
8. Why don't' you use Skype but you use WhatsApp?
9. Which WhatsApp features do you like the most?
10. Do you use WhatsApp for escaping communication or do you use WhatsApp because it gives you convenience in your communication?
11. People make friends electronically such as Facebook, and they continue to their relationships in the real world. Is the usage of WhatsApp the same way?
12. Does WhatsApp move you away from face-to-face communication?
13. Can you compare the way you communicate before using WhatsApp and after using WhatsApp?
14. When you start a day, which social media do you check first early in the morning?
15. Before going to bed and sleep, which social media do you check last in the evening?
16. What is the importance of using WhatsApp on special days (e.g., celebrations)? Do you prefer using other types of social media in place of WhatsApp on special days?
17. When do you tend to use WhatsApp? Is it short messages?, messages with a photo?, a celebration message?, a ready message (e.g., an electronic postcard)?
18. Does use of WhatsApp in your workplace affect your working productivity?